

APPENDIX D

LDD Staff Focus Group and Interviews

The web site of the Library Development Department (LDD) of the Montana State Library gives the following description of the LDD. “LDD staff provides consulting services to all libraries in Montana and assists with the improvement of library services statewide. Information and assistance are provided in technology, state certification program, library improvement projects, collection management, federal grant and assistance programs, legal issues, library statistics, federation activities, and statewide licensing and purchasing of electronic resources. LDD also provides training and continuing education opportunities of all kinds for library staff across the state.”

Focus Group Discussion

Four staff members took part in the discussion, including one consultant who participated via telephone. Their tenure with the MSL ranged from two to fourteen years.

What program or activity carried out with LSTA funds has had the greatest impact since 1997?

We facilitated providing Internet connectivity—connecting rural libraries to the world.

Building the infrastructure would have taken another ten years without LSTA funds.

Having the State Library doing it also made it important; some of the small libraries needed extra attention to raise their awareness of technology and the Internet (and their need for it).

The technology consultants hear they’re the best thing the state library has done. The small rural libraries are so grateful for our help. They’re glad to have a contact, someone to work through their problems with them.

We’ve been able to provide more continuing education and workshops. That has improved how many of the librarians like their jobs. They have more confidence in themselves now.

We also contribute to MLA’s Wired Montana listserv. That has helped us organize a lot—share info and resources, spread word on continuing education events. It means we have a common base for communications. It’s good for keeping people aware of what’s going on politically too.

Staff here negotiated statewide contracts too for OCLC and InfoTrac. (That actually started before MLN, with Lasercat and WLN.)

Are these things that would have happened without LSTA, but perhaps not as soon?

The consulting work of the technology consultants wouldn't have happened because individual communities wouldn't have had the funds or known what they needed. Some communities would have, but it wouldn't have happened for many. The trust zone for consultants wouldn't have happened. We do a lot of hand holding, they trust us in a variety of things. With the Gates computers, for example, we had to tell them that it would be all right. We're a support base for them and it wasn't inevitable.

The idea for having technology consultants was generated from the field.

We provide easier access to continuing education, but they could have gotten that elsewhere; Internet connectivity would have happened eventually.

Continuing education would have been a lot more limited without LSTA funds. Librarians would have had to rely on MLA, etc. LSTA funds support workshops and the institute

The consortia elements would have happened, but the technology consultants have helped with federations and their work. Federation structure has also caused some things to happen. The State Library supports that in helping people stay on target. Groups probably would have figured out themselves, but the MSL has helped them work.

LISD is a participant in the shared database and is coordinating other state agencies in shared database. If MSL hadn't been involved, would automation have happened?

It would have happened without us. The state universities have OMNI online catalog. Bozeman, the tribal colleges and some community colleges have combined in a shared catalog.

Participants in Missoula and Bitterroot were talking already. The shared catalogs were in the progress; it's just that MSL has supported the communication for things to happen. State library has leveled the playing field with a welcome mat. People are thinking bigger than just locally (MLN gets credit for that).

We'll be asking focus group participants about two LDD goals 1) all Montana citizens have direct access to information through telecommunications at their libraries, and goal 3) Montana citizens are served by librarians and trustees who are knowledgeable about all aspects of library service. What comments do you think the librarians and trustees will have about progress on those goals?

Librarians are surprised how heavily Internet is used in their libraries. Now they're saying they need more and faster computers.

I get questions, how can we count these hits? They're looking for justification for getting bigger and better in the future. They didn't think it would happen. Small libraries have access to things much more easily and quickly via Internet (government information for example)

In some small rural libraries, because of low funding, there's been little change.

They have dial up access, but it's very limited. For the people in the community who have chosen to use the Internet, it has big impact, but others haven't used it yet. It's hard to figure out how the library can help.

Many librarians aren't terribly secure about what they can find on the Internet. We're moving in the direction, but we aren't there yet.

They do think it has improved, but filtering and censorship are problems. We heard lots of conversations at the library conference—lots of new issues for them

We've done a lot of workshops on how to use OCLC and Infotrac tools in some of the federations. Those who embraced those classes have been able to start providing new services (we're handling much at their level). They're starting to provide more reference at their own communities. Biggest problem is that they haven't found funds to increase staff to handle the new demands. Computers in libraries have stretched staffing resources. Helping patrons with computers in all sizes of libraries has created all sorts of new challenges. There's tremendous variety in what patrons can do too, and not enough staff to provide computer support for the variety of skills patrons have. Some librarians have to clean the toilet before they go home too! It's a shame but it's true. Some change has happened because of changes in personnel. Some staff left; new staff embraced technology.

Lots of older library people have been more technology resistant.

Goal 2— knowledgeable librarians and trustees?

When our department was formed, we decided to set out a more formal structure of events. We set up four events; now have just the fall workshop and summer institute. (Others have fallen away.) Also having the technology consultants available is ongoing continuing education.

With the older trustee manual, the staff did lots of dog and pony shows. Now with the new handbook, we're hoping it'll be easier to use. We're not sure how much training they'll want.

We're offered things for trustees. (We did a dog and pony show eight years ago, did get trustees to attend)

In last three years we haven't really tackled trustees. Federation meetings have done better. A few come to MLA.

The last Tamarack Federation meeting was OCLC type training and that wasn't suitable for trustees. So Bob took excerpts from forthcoming trustee manual and offered a session for trustees. They need a different level of information on lots of stuff. The session was very well received. It went two and a half hours when he thought it would be an hour. He particularly likes talking trustee to trustee, without having directors present. The sessions was happening under our guidance and we could correct misinformation.

Trustees need their own continuing education, either locally or at least regionally. It's hard enough to get them to federation meetings.

MLA used to have separate public and trustee divisions—somehow the trustees have floated away.

A lot of trustee education is one board at a time. It would be good if each board saw someone from the state library each year. Unfortunately, it's the good ones (trustees) who go away to training (They're not the ones that most need the training!). We need to develop a dynamic at the local level. It's helpful too to watch the director and trustee dynamic. If you can see what's going on you can work with them over time to help them with communication, their roles, etc. They need help in figuring out which job is theirs and which belongs to the other. (directors and trustees)

Talk a bit about the learning that takes place informally from tech consultants?

There are really two categories. One is getting acquainted and a cram session on what they need immediately, like OCLC Cat express. The second is brush up, going over something again. And answering questions they were afraid to ask in group sessions. Or talking people through something over phone; providing security and hand holding with something new. Sometimes this is even for continuing education credit if we fill out the forms. The other nice thing is that when I'm there doing a session, I'll do a session for whoever else is on the staff or in the area (schools, etc).

How have their needs changed?

It's a mark of sophistication on the part of their users. People have already tried to answer the questions on their own on the Internet; then they come to library for help.

What about the relationship with MLA? How do the programs fit together?

We don't compete, have a good relationship.

Karen sits on the MLA board; there's a lot of communication about conference planning.

We try not to duplicate their programs. It's a collaborative arrangement.

Diane is on the professional development committee of MLA. She hears public librarians would rather come to our summer institute than MLA. We don't hear negative things except that there are too many—people can't afford to go to all, have trouble deciding. Diane works with office of public instruction to get school librarians certificates for MLA attendance.

Worst thing is some do have to decide which continuing education program to attend.

The Institute comes shortly after the MLA conference.

How do you think people in focus groups will feel about the LDD goals? What criticisms will they have?

Not everyone likes to see all the LSTA money go to statewide projects. Some want grants for individual libraries.

People like the State Library leadership in setting standards and support levels with consultants. People want the benefits of statewide programs (MLN) and they also want money to play with. That does cause some problems. Some of the projects we used to do were some neat local things, but they weren't of the same magnitude.

Some libraries are looking for different grants outside state library.

Since federations have gone multi-type, you'll hear we don't do enough for schools. OPI doesn't have a school media resource person so they'd like us to do more.

You might hear some of our support is sporadic. Consultants were spread pretty thin for awhile—focusing on someone else means some of our follow through isn't as good as we'd like. Statewide stuff sometimes pulls us away.

It's really hard to draw the lines on technology support. It's very easy to become their technology support person. Advice versus support is a hard line to define sometimes. Things are subject to breakdown.

They'll say the State Library just doesn't get it in regards to local library budgets. (In some areas populations have decreased—librarians are unsure they'll be able to keep the lights on. They feel things State Library does are planned for the west, not the east.)

How will people in the focus groups rank priorities among the goals?

Goal 2 (Montana citizens will have timely access to information despite its location or format) That would Rank very highly

Goal 6 (All Montana citizens have access to library services.) This is the most important one. This is significant in rural areas.

A #8 goal would be help libraries get more money. We put together packages, but they're expensive. Librarians in rural areas see conflicting messages in this.

What grades would you give on progress being made on the goals?

Goal 1 *All Montana citizens have direct access to information through telecommunications at their libraries.*

A, B, B+, A We're not there yet (haven't found a way to get people to have their own computer) (Average=B+)

Goal 2 *Montana citizens will have timely access to information despite its location or format.*

B, C, B, B We're doing an average job. There are lots of format problems, lots of time is needed to address this. (Average= B-)

Goal 3 *Montana citizens are served by librarians and trustees who are knowledgeable about all aspects of library service.*

For librarians a B, trustees a C; a B; an A for librarians but a C for trustees; B for librarians and C trustees We get good marks for being responsive. (Average=librarians B; trustees C)

Goal 4 *Montana citizens know about and value the range of services provided by libraries.*

I'd give it a D. We spend lots of time in field. We've come up from an F, but have long way to go. The Montana public is a tough nut to crack. We will gain ground, but citizens have wonderment! Libraries haven't done well in this area either. It's a C. We're doing some stuff with statewide databases, press releases, but a lot of responsibility on this has to come from libraries promoting themselves. A C, I agree, we need to do better job. I haven't done much of this for years. The overall state picture is a C. We do rely on libraries to promote themselves. It hasn't been our priority. (Average=C)

Goal 5 *MSL, with federations and local library agencies, will provide leadership to assure that Montana citizens receive excellent library services.*

I'd give that a B. Federations are making good strides in providing leadership;

I'd say a B also. In the multi-type federations libraries are helping each other—not perfect or excellent; an A, we're doing well in providing leadership. B (Average=B)

Goal 6 *All Montana citizens have access to library services.*

B—in some areas a D in near future, but we can't do much about it in some areas; we're working on remote access to databases; B. B. B (Average=B)

Goal 7 *Montana's students are served by school libraries that meet state standards.*

An F--this has been our discarded element. Now that we've made federations multi-type we're working with schools, but school libraries are soooo very far behind. An F, but we are doing a cooperative technology survey; an F-- we're just not doing this. We're just spread really thin. "NA" didn't remember this was even here! "We don't have legal responsibility for school libraries." New superintendent is a school librarian so there may be hope. (Average=F)

Are there future directions or missing goals you'd add?

Maybe some activities are missing, i.e., goal 4—we should be doing pr workshops so they know how to do public relations.

We do things in our comfortable zones. But it seems like the State Library ought to be forming consortium with others—newspapers, radio associations, etc. If we organized that type of partnership/relationship, we could promote libraries on a statewide level. ALA has something like this.

Another goal might be encouraging local cooperation on some things. Schools, libraries, county offices could save money if they shared Internet, but there seem to be these local rivalries so I'm not sure how much could happen.

There's such a variety of technology providers that people at the local level are totally dismayed. They can't tell who's providing what or what the fee structure is. At the state level we should get some of these reps at the table trying to figure out what libraries can have access too. It's going to become even more complex and local libraries will be at total mercy of these providers. Telecommunications in the state seem to be a real mess. Some little phone companies know nothing beyond telephones. The market here is too small to interest the really big/good companies. And, those remaining aren't encouraged to cooperate. I don't know what we can do, but if we don't facilitate something, libraries are going to get disconnected.

There's a training glut; there's a real need for the State Library to become a clearinghouse. We could promote a two year training calendar; the State Library

wouldn't need to be in charge, but help MLA and federations, and larger local libraries coordinate and organize into beginning, intermediate, advanced training so that training is more effective overall. Seeing what was coming would help libraries budget so they get the training they need. It's kind of collective shot-gun training at present. There's too much on Wired Montana already. Libraries need help in trying to figure out how all this fits together.